

Medicine Bow Landscape Vegetation Analysis (LaVA)

Cooperating Agency Meeting Meeting Minutes

February 21, 2018; 9:30 am – 3:00 pm
In person or VTC

In Attendance:

Aaron Voos	Jerod Delay	Russ Bacon
Beth Ross	Justin Williams	Seth Kuchenbecker
Bret Callaway	Katie Cheesbrough	Steve Loose
Carson Engelskirger	Leanne Correll	Tim Douville
Chris Jones	Lisa Solberg-Schwab	Tony Hoch
Frank Romero	Mark Conrad	
Jake Brown	Melissa Martin	

Action Items:

- **March 14th - Priority Projects for Implementation:** Anyone with interest should submit a list of approximately five accounting units in which they would like to complete work. The list should be prioritized in order of importance. At next month's Cooperating Agencies Meeting, the group will review the submitted accounting unit priorities to identify overlap in geography and objectives. Through this, we hope to identify areas to complete work in the first years of the LaVA project. Each cooperator's list of prioritized accounting units should be submitted via email to Melissa Martin by **March 14th**.
- **March 14th - DEIS Chapter 1:** Chris Jones will work on a draft to share with Cooperating Agencies by March 14th, or sooner.
- **March 21st - Next Cooperator's Meeting:** At that time, we will review priority AU projects; discuss updates to a monitoring framework; and discuss perceptions of draft DEIS Chapter 1.
- **Continued:** Please provide Melissa with before and after pictures of project work for use in the EIS.

Agenda Topics:

1. Forest Supervisor Time

DISCUSSION

- The first chapter of the EIS should be completed by the next Cooperating Agencies Meeting. We will be moving forward in the most efficient way possible. Therefore, we will be soliciting for cooperator feedback throughout the writing of the NEPA rather than upon completion of the document.
- While we are not necessarily taking the exact same approach as SBEADMR (GMUG NF landscape analysis), as the situation on this forest differs, there are numerous lessons to be learned and information that can be gleaned.

- Concern continues to be raised due to the potential scope and scale of the LaVA project and what 360,000 acres of vegetation management could look like.
- We may or may not be able to attain the PA given personnel constraints, economic feasibility, on-the-ground conditions, etc. Therefore, we don't want to develop artificial or arbitrary constraints now; rather, we believe that analyses should determine if adjustments to the PA are warranted in terms of reducing the scope and scale of the project.
- Although the project may be frontloaded with silvicultural treatments to capture timber value before the wood deteriorates too much, we will strive to incorporate cooperating agency projects as they are brought forward.

2. AAR – Public Engagement Sessions

DISCUSSION

- The public engagement sessions were well attended and considered successful. The format allowed for one-on-one engagement with attendees and Forest Service and cooperating agency officials. We were able to distribute information to the attendees and correct misconceptions surrounding the project.
 - The attendance at the public engagement sessions in Laramie was significantly higher than those in Saratoga. That lack of public participation is assumed to be due to lack of public concern regarding the LaVA project in that community.
 - Public comments to agency officials were both positive and negative. Concerns continue to root from the project's scope and scale, the previous lack of continued public engagement, proposed temporary road mileage, and/or other Forest Service practices. Positive comments came from those interested in timber economic benefits and the project's flexibility to complete multiple objectives.
 - A thank you email was sent out to those who attended the public engagement sessions. The email also noted what overarching themes we heard at the sessions.
- In addition to the public engagement sessions, we have shared a press release, spoken with clubs and groups, and have given interviews to several media outlets.
- When communicating with the public, it is important to give a picture of what LaVA implementation may look like. This can be done through showing visuals, describing current Forest Service practices, and communicating how implementation will occur over a 15-year period.

CONCLUSION

The public engagement sessions in January gave us an opportunity to interact and share information with the public. The open format allowed for one-on-one engagement with many community members. Through this communication, several themes were identified and captured in a thank you letter sent out to those who attended the meeting. In addition to the public engagement sessions, we have shared LaVA project information in various other formats.

3. Future Public Involvement

DISCUSSION

- The LaVA project landing page on the Forest Service webpage is being updated. It will contain more visuals, up-to-date facts, and the project proposal.
- Additionally, work is beginning on a LaVA project story board. This platform has been successful on this forest for other projects. We hope to have a draft version by next month's Cooperating Agency Meeting for review by the group.
 - The comments feature on the story board platform could provide an additional way to submit comments during the scoping period for the draft EIS. The comments can be linked to specific locations selected on the platform's map of the LaVA project area.
- Public field trips and additional public engagement sessions could provide the public with a way to stay engaged in the project over its life. The field trips could be lead in part with volunteering cooperating agencies.

CONCLUSION

Public field trips and additional public engagement sessions could provide the public with a way to stay engaged in the project over its life. Additionally, we will be updating the LaVA project Forest Service webpage and creating a LaVA project storyboard.

4. LaVA Implementation – Step 1

DISCUSSION

- To prioritize projects under LaVA, the group will need to weigh the project benefits and factors (capacity, purpose and need, resources, safety, desired conditions vs. current conditions, natural events, etc.). A matrix could be used to organize and weigh the benefits when prioritizing projects.
- If cooperating agencies share in advance their action plans and upcoming priority projects, it will make planning and coordination easier. Groups interested in project implementation should submit a list of accounting units in which they would like to complete work in upcoming years. At next month's Cooperating Agencies Meeting, the group will review the submitted accounting unit priorities to identify overlap in geography and objectives. Through this, we hope to identify areas to complete work in the first years of the LaVA project.
 - Completing this activity on a yearly basis could help the cooperating agencies and Forest Service continue implementing projects for multiple benefits.

CONCLUSION

During the planning stage of LaVA implementation, the group will need to weigh the feasibility and benefits of proposed projects. A matrix weighing those factors could be created to aid those decisions. Communication amongst the group is essential in identify potential projects for implementation. Working within the same geographical area could allow for maximum cooperation and therefore, completion of the most multiple benefit projects.

5. LaVA Implementation – Step 4

DISCUSSION

- A monitoring plan should be created to ensure complete adaptive management during the life of the LaVA project. The monitoring will need to ensure we are in compliance with policy and regulation at the landscape and individual project levels. In addition to monitoring resource effects, we want to monitor the effectiveness of design criteria and implementation practices. Cooperators are encouraged to work with Forest Service staff in their respective field to develop specific monitoring strategies.
- The Forest's biannual monitoring plan could address some of the monitoring concerns brought up during the meeting specifically around water quality.
- Tim Douville volunteered to work on developing a Monitoring Framework for the group to review. Melissa will continue to advance the concept since a due date was not assigned. Melissa will also provide the Forest Monitoring Plan to CAs to help determine if the 'broad scale' monitoring program is sufficient for higher-level LaVA monitoring (e.g., looking at lynx thresholds; water quality/quantity; ECA thresholds; etc. as opposed to whether or not Design Criteria associated with a particular treatment are effective or not).

CONCLUSION

A monitoring plan is needed in an adaptive management NEPA project. Monitoring will need to occur on project and landscape level scales. A draft version of a monitoring plan is in the works.

6. Project Update

DISCUSSION

- Chris Jones from the Bighorn NF will be helping us advance the LaVA Project by helping to develop an Adaptive Management framework and by writing the EIS.
- We have identified a few on-forest small groups to advance topics like range of alternatives, hydrologic analysis assumptions, etc.
- As we develop concepts surrounding project implementation, we may be asking CAs to provide assistance in writing process papers.

CONCLUSION

We continue to make incremental steps in advancing the analysis. CA support in writing implementation process papers may be requested in the future.

Meeting adjourned.